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CC:
Subject: Scranton Times-Tribune (10-1) Cabot beat EPA to punch on well's water --- DIMOCK TOWNSHIP

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Cabot beat EPA to punch on well's water

By Laura Legere (Staff Writer)

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Of the 62 water wells the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency sampled in Dimock Township, one spurred the agency to take immediate action.

Test results from the well, which contained nine times the safe drinking water limit for arsenic, were flagged by regional EPA officials who quickly received approval from the agency's Washington, D.C., headquarters to provide the home with emergency replacement drinking water, emails between agency officials show.

The regulators drafted a plan to share the news with the resident, who has not been named. If she accepted the offered water, it would trigger a detailed chain of action to alert state regulators, elected officials, natural gas driller Cabot Oil and Gas Corp. and the press.

But when EPA officials visited the resident to tell her about the arsenic hazard on Feb. 17, they learned that state regulators had told her about the results two days earlier and Cabot began providing her with bottled water the day before.

At the resident's request, federal toxicologists returned to her home on March 1 to discuss health risks associated with arsenic exposure, but she told regulators she was happy with Cabot's delivered drinking water, an EPA spokeswoman later said.

The extent of the agency's effort - and the fact that Cabot provided the resident with water - was not disclosed in the EPA's statement in April when the agency publicly released the round of test results that included the arsenic finding.

At the time, the agency said only that "at one well, EPA found elevated levels of arsenic and offered alternate water but the resident declined."

Federal regulators did not try to determine the source of the arsenic. In a January memo outlining the agency's justification for investigating water quality in Dimock, the EPA described arsenic as a known human carcinogen and a "naturally occurring element widely distributed in the earth's crust" that "may also be present at elevated concentrations in the groundwater due to the use and effects of drilling fluids."

The resident also declined the state's offers of assistance, Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection spokesman Kevin Sunday said.

"Arsenic is naturally occurring and is not used in the completion process," a term for hydraulic fracturing of natural gas wells, he said.

When the EPA concluded its investigation in July, it released a statement saying that in all cases where it found substances that might cause a health concern in Dimock drinking water "the residents have now or will have their own treatment systems that can reduce concentrations of those hazardous substances to acceptable levels at the tap."

An EPA spokeswoman at the time described the treatment systems as "pre-existing treatment systems owned by the homeowner."

But for the home with high arsenic, the treatment system was provided by Cabot, a company spokesman confirmed.

"EPA, PADEP, and the homeowner do not believe Cabot is responsible for the arsenic levels," Cabot spokesman George Stark said. "Nonetheless, based on our commitment to working with the Dimock community and experience with water filtration systems, we identified and provided the homeowner with a treatment system that is removing arsenic down to non-detect levels."